The Late Middle Ages (1300-1527)

The Norman kings of England and the Capetian kings of France centralized royal power by stressing the duties of lesser magnates to greater ones and the unquestioning loyalty of all vassals to the king

Negotiated alliances between the feudal nobility, the church, and the towns fostered a sense of national consciousness and ultimately led to the Hundred Years War

The Hundred Years War

Began in 1337 as a fight over the right of succession to the French throne

In 1328 Charles IV of France dies without a male heir

Edward III of England claimed the throne by the right of his mother, ` Charles IV’s sister

But the French barons had no intention of declaring loyalty to an English king

They pledged their allegiance to Charles IV’s cousin Philip VI, the duke of Valois

The Valois dynasty ruled into the sixteenth century

English possession of French lands hampered attempts by the French kings to centralize the government of a unified nation

The English and the French also had competing economic interests in Flanders and on the high seas

However internal disunity in France initially hampered the ability of the French to marshal its greater population and resources towards resistance against the English

Tradition also slowed France’s adaptation to new military strategies that were employed by the English

English forces were much more disciplined and the also wielded the formidable long bow, which could be fired at a rate of six arrows per minute and could pierce the armor of a knight at 200 yards

The war unfolded in three stages

Conflict during the reign of Edward III

Edward stirred up rebellions against the French in the cities of Flanders by placing an embargo on the English wool that fed the Flemish mills

In 1340 the Flemish cities decided that their economic interest lay with England, and they acknowledged Edward’s claim to the throne in France and therefore, the overlord of Flanders

Later that year Edward defeated the French fleet in the first great battle of the war

In 1346 Edward attacked Normandy and seized the port of Calais

Exhaustion and the Black Death forced a truce in 1347 and there was no further action until 1356 when the English won their greatest victory at Poitiers

At Poitiers the English routed the French nobles and captured the French King John II

This development led to a breakdown of government in France

Power in France momentarily shifted to the Estates General a body representing the influential castes

Powerful merchants in the Estates General demanded similar rights granted to the English privileged classes in the Magna Carta

However, the Estates General was too divided to be an effective instrument of government

The different leaders from the various areas did not trust one another

The French privileged castes offloaded the cost of the war onto the peasants which led to a series of rebellions beginning in 1358 known as the Jacquerie

The nobility restored order by employing extreme violence against the peasants

In May of 1360, England compelled France to accept the terms spelled out in the Peace of Brétigny

Edward renounced his claim to the French throne, but he demanded an end to his vassalage to the king of France and the recognition of his sovereignty over Gascony, Guyenne, Poitou, and Calais

France was also required to pay a ransom of 3 million gold crowns for the return of the French King John II

The treaty didn’t hold, and hostilities reconvened within a few years

By 1377, the English only possessed a few coastal enclaves around Bordeaux

England began to suffer from the pressures similar to those in France after the death of Edward III

Peasant revolts and Edward III’s successor Richard II’s autocratic behavior turned his own nobility against him and he was replaced by his cousin Henry IV

Henry IV spent his reign consolidating his hold over England

However, his son Henry V, revived the war against France as a strategy to unify the English behind the king

When Henry V invaded Normandy, the French nobility were split into antagonistic factions, and some of the nobility refused to defend France from the English invaders

For example, the Burgundians refused to assist the Armagnacs in defending France

However, after the English defeated the Armagnacs at the battle of Agincourt, the Burgundians established a tentative truce with the Armagnacs

This alliance collapsed with the duke of Burgundy was assassinated by an Armagnac

Burgundy decided to avenge the death of the duke by helping the English invade Armagnac territory

With Burgundian assistance the English took Paris and captured the French king Charles VI

Henry V married Charles VI’s daughter

In 1420 the Treaty of Troyes disinherited Charles VI son and proclaimed Henry V to the French throne

When Henry V and Charles VI died around the same time in 1422, Henry’s infant son, Henry VI was declared king of England and France

Charles VI’s son, Charles VII, escaped and asserted the right to his father’s throne

However, it was a peasant girl, Joan, from Domremy who informed Charles VII that God had commissioned her to deliver Orleans from the English armies that besieged it

Charles VII was skeptical of Joan’s claim, but he was willing to try anything to reverse his fortunes against the English

The siege had stretched out 6 months, and the English troops were at a low point of exhaustion and withdrawal when Joan arrived with a fresh army

The English retreat from Orleans was followed by a succession of victories attributed to Joan

Joan’s talent especially lay in inspiring her men with self-confidence and a sense of a commitment to a nation

Within a few months after the liberation of Orleans, Charles VII recovered the coronation city of Rheims and was anointed king of France

Charles showed little gratitude to Joan, for when the Burgundians captured her, he abandoned her

The Burgundians and the English sought to discredit Joan and they turned he over to the Inquisition

After 10 weeks of interrogation she was executed as a relapsed heretic on May 30, 1431

Twenty-five years later Charles VII reopened her trial and had her cleared from all charges

She was canonized as a saint in 1920

Once France was united behind Charles VII, the English had no chance to hold onto their continental possessions

The duke of Burgundy recognized Charles VII in 1435 and by the time the war ended in 1453 the English only held a little territory around Calais

The war had hastened France’s transition from a feudal monarchy to a powerfully centralized state

In England the loss of the continental empire disillusioned the English people with their government and set them on the path to civil war

It ended the medieval phase in the history of the English monarchy

The Black Death

The number of people living in Europe doubled between 1000-1300

This population growth taxed the agricultural system of feudal Europe

Between 1315-1317 crop failures contributed to the worst famines in the Middle Ages

Starvation undermined health and increase the vulnerability to the bubonic plague that struck in 1348

The Black Death followed the trade routes from Asia

It appeared in Sicily first, then in Venice, Genoa, and northern Italy

The places that lay outside of the main trading networks were virtually unaffected by the plague

Plague bacilli were injected into an individual’s bloodstream by flea bites

Nobody understood these causes and thus they could not provide a solution or cure to the disease

Consequently, the plague inspired deep pessimism, panicky superstition, and an obsession with death and dying

People resorted to amulets and folk remedies

Religious fanatics flagellated themselves in a ritual penance for society at large

Sometimes unpopular minorities, like Jews, were targeted and murdered

The plague was most virulent when there was the highest population density

At times whole villages and urban districts were wiped out

As the number of laborers decreased, wages increased for the survivors

This tempted serfs to abandon the agricultural manors and seek work in the towns

Agricultural prices fell due to lessened demand for those products

However, the price of products manufactured by scarce skilled labor rose

These economic developments hurt the nobility since the value of their estates declined along with the decline of workers

The income from rents declined

The church was insulated from these problems to a degree

It suffered the same economic losses suffered from the landholding nobility

However, those losses were offset by increased demand for masses for the dead and by a flood of gifts and bequests

To offset some of these losses, landowners converted arable land into sheep pasturage

Herding required fewer expensive laborers

The nobility also began passing laws that required peasants to stay on their lands and freezing wages at low levels

This development contributed to the Jacquerie in France and the Peasant’s Revolt in England

Although cities were hit hard by the plague, they ultimately prospered from its effects

The effects of the plague contributed to the demand for the pleasure and luxuries provided by the cities

The plague reduced the supply of artisans

This caused the prices of manufactured items to rise

As the prices for manufactured goods rose and the prices for agricultural products fell, the cost of living for urban dwellers became lower

This development began to give the cities influence into the countryside and the rural gentry began to be absorbed into the urban patrician class

The plague contributed to tensions in the towns as the merchant class (caste?) found it difficult to maintain their traditional dominance over the artisans’ guilds

The guilds used their growing clout to enact restrictive legislation to protect local industries

Artisan guilds were able to keep demand for their products high by limiting the number of shops licensed to share their market

This frustrated many guild members who wanted to set up business for themselves, and thus it created strife within the guilds

Ecclesiastical Breakdown and Revival

The kings were able to take advantage of the rising power of the towns and the declining status of the feudal nobility in their attempts to consolidate their power and centralize their governments and economies

The church was in good shape at the end of the 13th century

The threat from the Holy Roman Emperor had been vanquished when Frederick II died

Louis IX of France was an enthusiastic supporter of the church

The eastern orthodox church had accepted a reunion with Rome in an attempt to persuade the West to send aid to defend Constantinople against the Turks

Pope Innocent II had increased the church’s secular power, but had diminished its spiritual authority

The papacy legislated its own laws and enforced them in its own courts

It presided over an efficient bureaucracy which was preoccupied with finances and secular influence

The papacy thought more in terms of its own needs than those of the church at large

Many observers noted how far the papacy had departed from the spiritual mission of the New Testament apostolic community

The papacy was a victim of its own success

The demise of Holy Roman imperial power meant that the popes could no longer appeal for support as leaders of Italian resistance to German kings

As threats from Germany retreated, political intrigue and competition swept the Italian states

The papacy simply became another secular prize up for grabs

Pope Gregory X tried to guarantee the freedom of papal elections by ordering the cardinals to be sequestered while choosing the successor to the papacy

This was to try to ensure that there would not be any outside political meddling in the process

This effort was not sufficient however, since the College of Cardinals was already politicized

The political infighting was so great that the college was not able to choose a pope from 1292-1294

They eventually chose Celestine V, who abdicated only after a few weeks in office, and died shortly thereafter

Celestine’s successor was Boniface VIII in 1294

Boniface had become the pope just as France and England were in their early nation-forming states prior to the development of the Hundred Year’s War

As France and England mobilized for war, they began levying extraordinary taxes on their clergy

Pope Innocent II had decreed earlier in 1215 that rulers had no right to tax the clergy without papal approval

Boniface VIII took a strong stand in defense of papal prerogatives

In 1296 he issued an order forbidding the lay taxation of clergy

In England, Edward I retaliated by denying the clergy the protection of the state’s laws and courts

In France, Philip IV (The Fair) retaliated by depriving the papacy the bulk of its income by forbidding the exportation of money from France to Rome

Boniface was forced to back down, and he declared that kings could tax the clergy in times of emergency

Boniface also agreed to canonize Philip IV’s grandfather Louis IX

During this time Boniface was also besieged by his enemies in Italy

Rivals to Boniface VIII’s Gaetani family, the Colonnas family, joined with the Spiritual Franciscans (those who wished to maintain the original Franciscan way of life) joined in a campaign to invalidate Boniface VIII’s election to the papacy

They claimed he had Celestine murdered

Boniface VIII fought back

When Rome celebrated a jubilee in 1300 and tens of thousands of pilgrims visited the city, Boniface VIII interpreted that as a show of support

Boniface VIII was emboldened to claim leadership in international politics

He infuriated the English by supporting the Scots against the English

In France, Philip IV was so outraged that he had Boniface’s representative in Paris arrested and convicted in royal courts for heresy and treason

Boniface VIII demanded the bishop’s unconditional release and revoked the concessions of taxation under emergency conditions

Boniface VIII sent Philip IV a message that informed him that God set popes over kings

Boniface VIII followed up with a message that temporal authority of kings was subject to the spiritual power of the church

This message was interpreted by Philip IV as a declaration of war

Philip IV sent his chief minister with an army into Italy to arrest Boniface VIII

The French force surprised Boniface VIII in August 1303 and beat him so badly that he died that October

Boniface VIII’s successor Benedict XI was in no position to retaliate against the French

Benedict XI died in 1304, and his successor was Clement V, an archbishop from France

Clement V totally capitulated to Philip IV’s demands

Philip IV’s victory was complete when Clement V moved the papal court to Avignon, an independent city on land that belonged to the pope, but in an area that was culturally French

The papacy remained at Avignon for almost 70 years

From this point on no pope was ever again to seriously threaten a king

Avignon papacy (1309-1377)

Because the papacy was cut off from their Roman estates, the popes had to find new sources of income

Clement V expanded papal taxes on the clergy

Clement VI began selling indulgences

Releases from penance for sin

The concept of purgatory developed as part of this campaign

When Pope John XXII ascended to the throne, he found himself in a quarrel with the German emperor Louis IV

This fight inspired an important debate about the nature of legitimate authority

John XXII had supported a different candidate for the election of the German emperor, and he refused to accept the outcome of the election and Louis IV’s title

Louis IV retaliated by accusing John XXII of heresy and declared him deposed in favor of an antipope

William of Ockham in England and Marsilius of Padua in Italy made the case for the king over the pope

William said that the pope was only a member of the church and had no special powers making him infallible

Marsilius said that the clergy was limited to spiritual functions and had no right to coerce laity

Ideas like this contributed to the development of the Protestant Reformation and the separation of church and state

The successors of John XXII began building a great palace at Avignon, and lobbying for a greater number of secular patrons in order to secure more money

The secular governments began passing legislation restricting papal jurisdiction and taxation

The English had no interest in supporting a church they believed was simply a puppet of French interests

The French monarchy insisted on its Gallican liberties that granted the king control of ecclesiastical appointments and taxation

German and Swiss cities also limited and overturned traditional clerical privileges and immunities

Discontent with the worldly clergy reached beyond the forming centralized governments

Common parishioners also became discontented with the secular concerns of the church

In England, an Oxford theologian, John Wycliffe was a major intellectual spokesperson for the rights of the royalty against the designs of the popes

Wycliffe maintained that since all authority came from God, only leaders who lived pious lives could claim legitimacy

Faithful laypeople had the right to pass judgement on corrupt ecclesiastics and undertake the reform of the church

This argument could also be used to justify resistance to secular rulers whose immorality proved they held no mandate from God

Wycliffe anticipated some of the positions taken later on by the Protestants

Challenged papal infallibility

The dogma of transubstantiation that gave the clergy power over the laity

And the policies that restricted the laity’s access to the scriptures

Wycliffe’s followers were called Lollards (derogatorily meaning those without an academic background)

They advocated Wycliffe’s teachings

Disseminated translations of the Scripture

Championed clerical poverty

As long as the Lollards stuck to religious matters, the English government tolerated them

But after the 1381 Peasant’s Revolt the state decided that Lollardy was subversive, and in 1401 it was declared a capital offense

Government was not as strong in Bohemia as it was in England

The university of Prague was founded in 1348 and became the center for a Czech nationalist movement

John Huss became the rector of the university in 1403 and became a leader of the nationalist movement

He believed that a reformed religion would help the Czechs develop a national identity

He advocated translations of the Bible and rejected some practices that were considered superstitious

He offered both bread and wine to the laity

He rejected the idea that the clergy were spiritually superior to the people

He also rejected transubstantiation

Wycliffe’s ideas were added to Huss’ ideas and this gave rise to the Hussite movement

Huss was excommunicated in 1410 and he successfully petitioned for a hearing to be held before an international church council in Switzerland

Although he was granted safe passage, he was imprisoned and executed as a heretic in 1415

The reaction in Bohemia was fierce, and a militant branch of the Hussites called the Taborites took up arms and violently took over the Bohemian church

The Great Schism and the Conciliar Movement

In 1377 Pope Gregory XI announced that the papacy would leave Avignon and return to Rome

Gregory XI died soon after returning to Rome

His successor was Urban VI

When Urban VI announced his plans to reform the church’s central administration, the cardinals, most of whom were French, insisted on returning the papacy to Avignon

Then they announced that Urban VI’s election was invalid since it had been forced upon them by a Roman mob

They then proceeded to elect a true pope, which was Clement VII, a cousin of the French king

Urban VI denied the allegations and appointed a new slate of cardinals

Europe was now confronted with two papal courts

The support for the different courts ran along political lines

England and its allies (Holy Roman Empire, Hungary, Bohemia, and Poland) acknowledged Urban VI

The French and their allies (Naples, Scotland, Castile, and Aragon) supported Clement VII

The schism created a serious political crisis in Europe

It was decided that the only way to resolve the issue was to convene an ecumenical church council

The main problem was that only a pope could call such a council and neither pope was inclined to do that

And since theoretically since a pope’s authority came from God and not the people, it was not certain that a council could depose a pope

To make the argument for a council, assumptions about the nature of authority had to be examined

This led to the development of a rationale for popular government

Those in favor of holding a council argued that the ultimate authority resided with the people

Since popes were choses to care for the people’s needs, they were accountable to the people and served at their pleasure

31 Years after the schism began cardinals from both sides embraced the idea of a council

They met at the Council of Pisa in 1409-1410

They deposed their respective popes and agreed on a single new one

However, neither of the popes accepted the Council’s decision and the effect of the meeting at Pisa was the creation of a third pope, now at Pisa

At the Council of Constance in 1414-1417

The cardinals chose a new pope Martin V and passed a resolution that the council was the true government of the church and supreme over popes

The Council of Basel in 1431-1449

When this council granted the Bohemians jurisdiction over their church, the pope protested that it violated his authority and he upstaged the council by announcing reconciliation with the Eastern Church

When the Council of Basel responded hostilely to the pope’s flex of power, the European kings fearing a return to schism withdrew their support for the conciliar movement

In 1460 a papal statement condemned conciliarism

The main achievement of the movement was that it planted the thought that the role of the leader of an institution was to care for the well-being of its members

This concept had wide-ranging ramifications for the church and the state

Medieval Russia

According to legend Vladimir (972-1015), prince of Kiev decided to modernize his people by having them convert to one of the world’s great religions

He invited representatives from Eastern and Western Christianity, Judaism, and Islam

After listening to the arguments, he chose Easter Christianity

Vladimir’s successor, Yaroslav the Wise, turned Kiev into a cultural center that rivaled Constantinople

After his death in 1054, rivalry among the Russian princes split their people into three divisions

The Great Russians

The White Russians

The Little Russians (Kiev)

The governments of the Russian states combined monarchy (prince), aristocracy (council of noblemen), and democracy (popular assembly of all adult males)

The social divisions were

Clergy

Army officers

Boyars (wealthy landowners)

Townsmen

Peasants

Semi-free debtors working off their obligations

Slaves (prisoners of war)

In the 13th century Mongol armies swept through China and the Muslim world

Ghengis Khan’s forces swept through Russia in 1223 and Kiev fell to the Mongol general Batu Khan in 1240

When the Mongols divided their territory, the division known as the Golden Horde exacted tribute from Russian cities

The Golden Horde established their capital on the lower Volga River and ruled the steppe region of southern Russia

Agents were established in all the main Russian towns to oversee taxation and the conscription of soldiers

One of the great effects of Mongol rule over Russia was that it distanced Russians from western influence

Russian women that married Mongols were influenced by Islam

The Mongols interfered little with the political and religious institutions of their Russian subjects and the stability they brought to Russia had economic benefits

The princes of Moscow assisted with their Mongol overlords in the collection of tribute, growing wealthy in the service of their masters

When Mongol control weakened, the princes added to the territory

Moscow controlled

They pursued a policy called “the gathering of the Russian Land” and expanded the principality of Moscow by purchase, colonization, and conquest

In 1380 Grand Duke Dimitri of Moscow defeated Tartar forces at Kulikov Meadow and precipitated the decline of Mongol hegemony

Another century passed before Ivan III “The Great” brought all of northern Russia under Moscow’s control

By the end of the 14th century Moscow had become the political and religious center of Russia

When Constantinople fell to the Turks in 1453, Moscow took on a new role and proclaimed itself the “third Rome” and the guardian of Orthodox civilization